

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM USLO PEKING
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1867
INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 2717

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR SREF CH VM

SUBJ: BORDER CLASH RAISES SINO-VIETNAM TENSION

1. SUMMARY. THE AUGUST 25 BRAWL AT FRIENDSHIP PASS ON THE SINO-VIETNAMESE BORDER HAS BROUGHT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES ONCE AGAIN TO THE CRISIS POINT. CHINA HAS ACCUSED VIETNAM OF OCCUPYING PART OF ITS TERRITORY, AND HAS RECALLED ITS CHIEF NEGOTIATOR FROM THE HANOI TALKS. A FURTHER EXCALATION CANNOT BE RULED OUT. END SUMMARY.

2. HANOI AND PEKING HAVE PUBLISHED WILDLY DIFFERING ACCOUNTS OF THE BLOODY INCIDENT AT FRIENDSHIP PASS ON AUGUST 25, BUT IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THSNEHZERE FATALITIES. NCNA CLAIMED THAT FOUR CHINESE REFUGEES WERE KILLED BY VIETNAMESE SECURITY MEN, AND THAT AT LEAST TEN OTHERS
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HAD DISAPPEARED.

3. FILM CLIPS OF THE INCIDENT WHICH WERE SHOWN ON PEKING TV AUGUST 28 WERE UNPERSUASIVE. NO BEATINGS WERE CLEARLY SHOWN. MUCH OF THE FOOTAGE WAS OF UNIDENTIFIED INDIVIDUALS THROWING STONES AT UNIDENTIFIED TARGETS.

4. NEVERTHELESS, THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE INCIDENT IS INDICATED BY AN AUGUST 27 ARTICLE BY AN NCNA CORRESPONDENT, WHO CHARGES THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE INCIDENT VIETNAMESE TROOPS AND SECURITY PERSONNEL OCCUPIED AND FORTIFIED HILLS LYING ON CHINESE TERRITORY. ACCORDING TO THE CORRESPONDENT, THIS ACTION HAS AROUSED "GREAT INDIGNATION AMONG THE CHINESE ARMY MEN AND PEOPLE AT FRIENDSHIP PASS".

6. THE INCIDENT HAS ALSO PRECIPITATED A CHINESE WALKOUT FROM THE HANOI TALKS ON THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. PRC VICE FOREIGN MINISTER CHUNG HSI-TUNG RETURNED "TEMPORARILY" TO PEKING AUGUST 28. TWO DAYS EARLIER, AT THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE TALKS, VIETNAMESE VICE FOREIGN MINISTER HOANG BICH SON HAD TURNED DOWN A JOINT ANNOUNCEMENT PROPOSED BY CHUNG WHICH WOULD HAVE PROVIDED FOR THE RETURN HOME OF CHINESE REFUGEES STRANDED AT THE BORDER AND GUARANTEED THEM AGAINST FUTURE DISCRIMINATION. SON ALSO REJECTED THE RETURN TO VIETNAM BY ANY REFUGEES WHO HAD ALREADY REACHED CHINA. CHUNG COMPLAINED THAT THIS TOTAL REJECTION HAD LEFT "NO ROOM FOR ANY FURTHER CONSULTATION".

6. WITH THE TALKS SUSPENDED AND THE PRC CLAIMING THAT VIETNAM HAS OCCUPIED SOME OF ITS TERRITORY,
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RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE REACHED A NEW LOW. AT THE SAME TIME, NCNA ON AUGUST 28 CARRIED A COMMENTARY DENOUNCING VIETNAM'S "ANTI-CHINA" POSITION IN MORE THAN USUALLY HARSH TERMS. WHILE WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT NEITHER SIDE WISHES TO RUN THE RISK OF ARMED CONFLICT, IT APPEARS THAT FURTHER INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE ALONG THE BORDER CAN BE EXPECTED. THERE IS ALWAYS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THESE COULD ESCALATE, AND A LIMITED ARMED RESPONSE BY THE PRC CANNOT BE RULED OUT.
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